THE SALT LAKE HERALD

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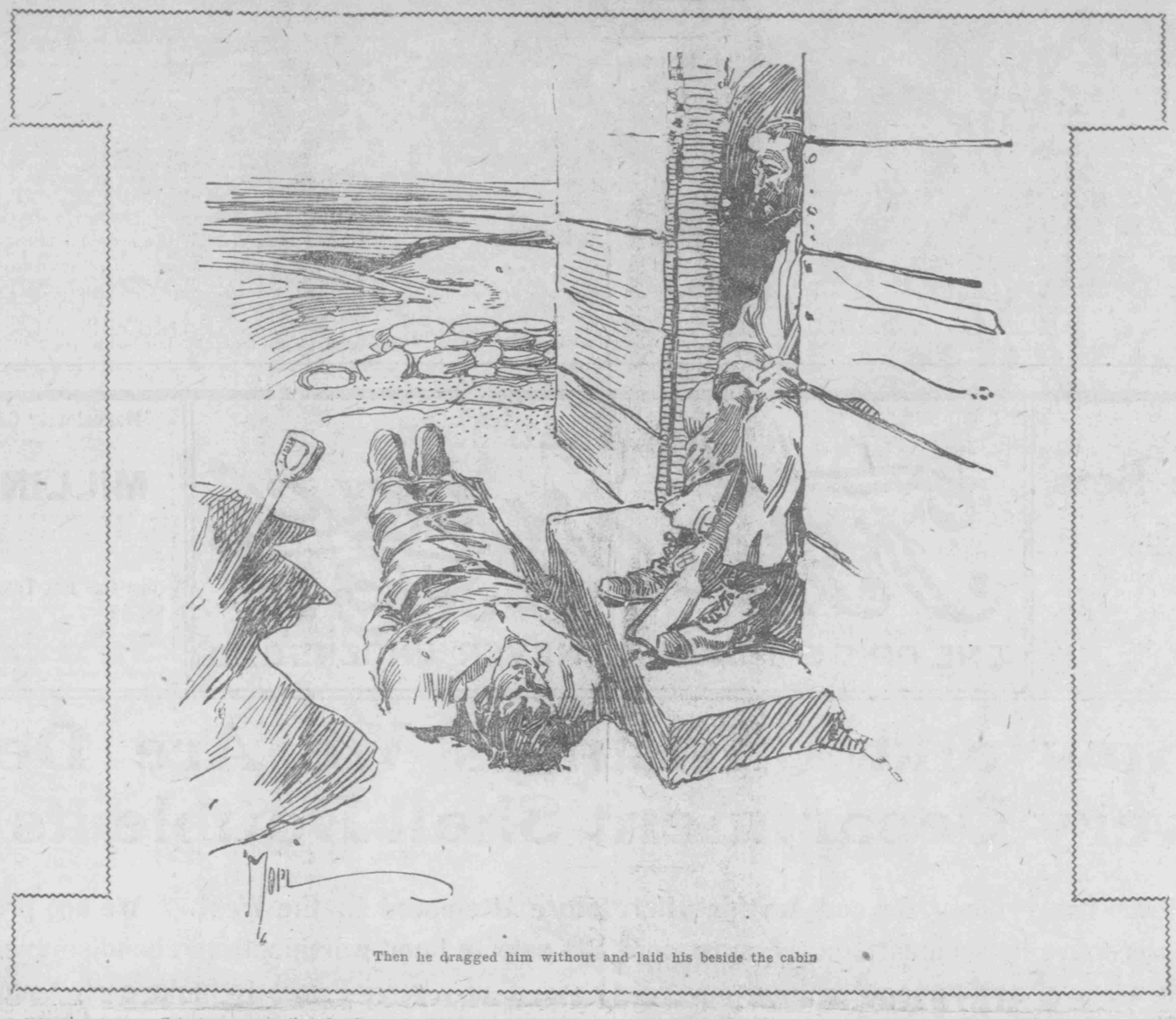
SECTION FOUR

The Man With the Gash.

BY JACK LONDON.



Then he dragged him without and laid his beside the cabin

JACOB KENT had suffered from cupidity all the days of his life. He had been a weaver of cioth from the crable until the fever of Klondike had entered his blood and torn him away from his loom. His cabin stood midway betgeen Six-Mile Post and the Stuart river, and men who made it a custom to travel the trail to Dawson likened him to a robber baron, perched in his fortress and exacting toll from the caravans that used his ill-kept roads.

One afternoon in April he sat by his door—for all the world like a predatory spider—marveling at the heat of the returning sun and keeping an eye on the trail for prospective flies. The Yukon lay at his feet, a sea of ice, disappearing around two great bends to the north and south and stretching an honest two miles from bank to bank.

Jacob Kent was feeling particularly good that afternoon. The record had been broken the previous night, and he had sold his hospitality to no less than twenty-eight visitors. True, it had been quite uncomfortable, and four had snored beneath his bunk all night; but then it had added appreciable weight to the sack in which he kept his gold dust. That sack, with its glittering yellow treasure, was at once the chief delight and the chief bane of his existence. Heaven and hell lay within its slender mouth. In the nature of things, there being no privacy to his one-roomed dwelling, he was tortured by a constant fear of theft. It would be very easy for these bearded, desperate-looking strangers to make way with it.

Often he dreamed that such was the case, and awoke in the grip of nightmare. A select number of these robbers haunted him through his dreams, and he came to know them quite well, especially the bronzed leader with the gash on his right cheek. This fellow was the most persistent of the lot, and, because of him, he had, in his waking moments, constructed several score of hiding places in and about the cabin. After a concealment he would breathe freely again, perhaps for several nights, only to collar the Man with the Gash in the very act of unearthing the sack. Then, on awakening in the midst of the usual struggle, he would at once get up and transfer the bag to a new and more ingenious crypt. So he continued to bleed the unfortunates who crossed the threshold, and at the same time to add to his trouble with every ounce that went into the sack.

As he sat cunning himself a thought came to Jacob Kent that brought him to his feet with a jerk. The pleasures of life had culminated in the continual weighing and reweighing of his dust; but a shadow had been thrown upon his pleasant avocation, which he had hitherto failed to brush aside. His gold scales were quite small; in fact, their maximum was a pound and a half—eighteen ounces—while his hoard mounted up to something like three and a third times that. He had never been able to weight it all at one operation. It was the solution of this problem flashing across his mind that had just brought him to his feet. He searched the trail carefully in either direction. There was nothing in sight, so he went inside.

In a few seconds he had the table cleared away and the scales set up. On one side he placed the stamped disks to the equivalent of fifteen ounces, and balanced it with dust on the other. Replacing the weights with dust, he then had thirty ounces precisely balanced. These, in turn, he placed together on one side and again balanced with more dust. By this time the gold was exhausted, and he was sweating liberally. He trembled with ecstasy, ravished beyond measure. Nevertheless, he dusted the sack thoroughly, to the last least grain, till the balance was overcome and one side of the scales sank to the table. Equilibrium, however, was restored by the addition of a penny-weight and five grains to the opposite side. He stood, head thrown back, transfixed.

The sack was empty, but the potentiality of the scales had become immeasurable. Upon them he could weigh any amount from the tinest grain to pounds upon pounds. Mammon laid out fingers on his heart. The sun swung on its westering way till it flashed through the open doorway, full upon the yellow-burdoned scales.

"Gawd blime me! but you 'ave the makin' of several quid there, 'aven't you?"

Jacob Kent wheeled about at the same time reaching for his double-barreled shotgun, which stood handy. But when his eyes lit on the intruder's face he staggered back dizzily. It was the face of the Man with the Gash!

The man looked at him curiously.

"Oh, that's all right," he said, waving his hand deprecatingly. "You needn't think as I'll 'arm you or your blasted dust. You're a rum 'un, you are," he added reflectively, as he watched the sweat pouring from off Kent's face and the quavering of his knees. "W'y don't you pipe up an' say somethin'?" he went on, as the other struggled for breath. "Wot's gone wrong o' your gaff? Anythink the matter?"

"W—w—where'd you get it?" Kent at last managed to articulate, raising a shaking forefinger to the ghastly scar which seamed the other's cheek.

"Shipmate stove me down with a marlinspike fro the main royal. An' now as you 'ave your figger'ead in trim, wot I want to know is, wot's it to you? That's wot I want to know—wot's it to you? Gawd blime me! do it 'urt you? Ain't it smug enough for the likes o' you? That's wot I want to know!"

"No, no," Kent answered, sinking upon a stool with a sickly grin, "I was just wondering."

"Did you ever see the like?" the other went on truculently.

"No."

"Ain't it a beaute?"

"Yes," Kent nodded his head approvingly, intent on humoring this strange visitor, but wholly unprepared for the outburst which was to follow his effort to be agreeable.

"You blasted, bloomin,' burgoo-eatin' son-of-a-sea swab! Wot do you mean, a sayin' the most onsightly thing Gawd Almighty ever put on the face o' man is a beaute? Wot do you mean, you——"

And thereat this fiery son of the sea broke off into a string of Oriental profanity, mingling gods and devils, lineages and men, metaphors and monsters, with so savage a virility that Jacob Kent was paralyzed. He shrank back, his arms lifted as though to ward off physical violence

"The sun's knocked the bottom out o' the trail," said the Man with the Gash. "An' I only 'ope as you'll appreciate the hopportunity of consortin' with a man o' my mug. Get steam up in that fire box o' yourn. I'm goin' to unrig the dogs an' grub 'em. An' don't be shy o' the wood, my lad; there's plenty more where that come from, and it's you've got the time to sling an ax. An' tote up a bucket o' water while you're about it. Lively! 'or I'll run you down, so 'elp me!"

Such a thing was unheard of. Jacob Kent was making the fire, chopping wood, packing water—doing menial tasks for a guest!

"Strike me blind but you're a 'ustler," the Man with the Gash said admiringly, his head cocked to one side, as his host bustled about. "You never 'ort to 'ave gone Klondiking. It's the keeper of a pub' you was laid out for. An' it's often as I 'ave 'eard the lads up an' down the river speak o' you, but I adn't no idea you was so jolly nice."

"Do it 'urt you." Jim Cardegee thundered suddenly, looking up from the spreading of his blankets and encountering the rapt gaze of the other fixed upon that gash. "It strikes we as 'ow it 'ud be the proper thing for you to draw your jib, douse the glim, an' turn in, seein' as 'ow it worries you. Jes' lay to that, you swab, or so 'elp me I'll take a pull on your peak-purchases!"

Kent was so nervous that it took three puffs to blow out the slush-lamp, and he crawled into his blankets without even moving his moccasins. The sailor was soon snoring lustily from his hard bed on the floor, but Kent lay staring up into the blackness, one hand on the shotgun, resolved not to close his eyes the whole night. He had not had an opportunity to secrete his five pounds of gold, and it lay in the ammunition box at the head of his bunk. But, try as he would, he at last dozed off with the weight of his dust heavy on his soul. Had he not inadvertently fallen asleep with his mind in such condition, the somnambulic demon would not have been invoked, nor would Jim Cardegee have gone mining next day with a dishpan.

The sailor lay like a log, while his host tossed restlessly about, the victim of strange fantasies. As midnight drew near he suddenly threw off the blankets and got up. It was remarkable that he could do what he then did without even striking a light. Perhaps it was because of the darkness that he kept his eyes shut, and perhaps it was for fear he would see the terrible gash on the cheek of his visitor; but, be this as it may, it is a fact that, unseeing, he opened his ammunition box, put a heavy charge into the muzzle of the shotgun without spilling a particle, rammed it down with double wads and then put everything away and got back into bed.

Just as daylight laid its steel-gray fingers on the parchment window Jacob Kent awoke. Turning on his elbow, he raised the lid and peered into the ammunition box. Whatever he saw, or whatever he did not see, exercised a very peculiar effect upon him, considering his neurotic temperament. He glanced at the sleeping man on the floor, let the lid down gently and rolled over on his back. It was an unwonted calm that rested on his face. Not a muscle quivered. There was not the least sign of excitement or perturbation. He lay there a long while thinking and when he got up and began to move about it was in a cool, collected manner, without noise and without hurry.

It happened that a heavy wooden peg had been driven into the ridge-pole just above Jim Cardegee's head. Jacob Kent, working softly, ran a piece of half-inch manila over it, bringing both ends to the ground. One end he tied about his waist, and with the other he rove a running noose. Then he cocked his shotgun and laid it within reach by the side of numerous moose-hide thongs. By an effort of will he bore the sight of the scar, slipped the noose on the sleeper's head and drew it taut by throwing back on his weight, at the same time seizing the gun and bringing it to bear.

Jim Cardegee awoke, choking, bewildered, staring down the twin wells of steel.

"Where is it?" Kent asked, at the same time slacking on the rope.

"You blasted—ugh——"

Kent merely threw back his weight, shutting off the other's wind.

"Bloomin'—Bur—ugh——"

"Where is it?" Kent repeated.

"Wot?" Cardegee asked, as soon as he had caught his breath.

"The gold dust."

"Wot gold dust?" the perplexed sailor demanded.

"You know well enough—mine."

"Ain't seen nothink of it. Wot do ye take me for? A safe deposit? Wot 'ave I got to do with it, any-'ow?"

"Mebbe you know, and mabbe you don't know, but anyway I'm going to stop your breath till you do know. And if you lift a hand, I'll blow your head off!"

"Vast heavin'!" Cardegee roared, as the rope tightened.

Kent eased away a moment and the sailor, wriggling his neck as though from the pressure, managed to loosen the noose a bit and work it up so the point of contact was just under the chin.

"Well," Kent questioned, expecting the disclosure.

But Cardegee grinned. "Go ahead with your 'angin, you bloomin' old pot-walloper!"

Then, as the sailor had anticipated, the tragedy became a farce. Cardegee being the heavier of the two, Kent, throwing his body backward and down, could not lift him clear off the ground. Strain and strive to the uttermost, the sailor's feet still stuck to the floor and sustained a part of his weight. The remaining portion was supported by the point of contact just under his chin. Failing to swing him clear, Kent hung on, resolved to slowly throttle him or force him to tell what he had done with the hoard. But the Man with the Gash would not throttle. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and at the end of that time, in despair, Kent let his prisoner down.

"Well," he remarked, wiping away the sweat, "if you won't hang you'll shoot. Some men wasn't born to be hanged, anyway."

"An it's a pretty mess as you'll make o' this 'ere cabin floor." Cardegee was fighting for time. "Now, look 'ere, I'll tell you wot we do; we'll lay our 'eads 'longside an' reason together. You've lost some dust. You say as 'ow I know, an' I say as 'ow I don't. Let's get a hobservation an' shape a course——"

"Vast heavin'!" Kent dashed in, maliciously imitating the other's enunciation. "I'm going to shape all the courses in this shebang, and you observe; and if you do anything more, I'll bore you sure as Moses!"

"For the sake of my mother——"

"Whom God have mercy upon if she loves you. Ah! Would you?" He frustrated a hostile move on the part of the other by pressing the cold muzzle against his forehead. "Lay quiet, now! if you lift as much as a hair, you'll get it."

It was rather an awkward task, with the trigger of the gun always within pulling distance of the finger; but Kent was a weaver, and in a few minutes had the sailor tied hand and foot. Then he dragged him without and laid him by the side of the cabin, where he could overlook the river and watch the sun climb to the meridian.

"Now I'll give you till noon and then——"

"Wot?"

"You'll be hitting the brimstone trail. But if you speak up, I'll keep you till the next bunch of mounted police come by."

"Well, Gawd blime me, if this ain't a go. 'Ere I be, innercent as a lamb, an' 'ere you be, lost all o' your top 'amper an' out o' your reckonin', run me foul an' going' to rake me into 'ell-fire. You bloomin' old pirut, you——"

Jim Cardegee loosed the strings of his profanity and fairly outdid himself. Jacob Kent brought out a stool that he might enjoy it in comfort. Having exhausted all the possible combinations of his vocabulary, the sailor quieted down to hard thinking, his eyes gauging the progress of the sun, which tore up the eastern slope of the heavens with unseemly haste.

His hands were tied behind him, and, pressing against the snow, they were wet with the contact. This moistening of the rawhide he knew would tend to make it stretch, and, without apparent effort, he endeavored to stretch it more and more.

He watched the trail hungrily, and when in the direction of Sixty Mile a dark speck appeared for a moment against the white background of an ice jam he cast an anxious eye at the sun. It had climbed nearly to the zenith. Now and again he caught the black speck clearing the hills of ice and sinking into the intervening hollows, but he dared not permit himself more than the most cursory glances for fear of rousing his enemy's suspicion. Once when Jacob Kent rose to his feet and searched the trail with care Cardegee was frightened, but the dog sled had struck a piece of trail running parallel with a jam, and remained out of sight till the danger was past.

"I'll see you 'ung for this," Cardegee threatened, attempting to draw the other's attention. "An' you'll rot in 'ell, jes' you see if you don't.

"I say," he cried, after another pause; "d'ye b'lieve in ghosts?" Kent's sudden start made him sure of his ground, and he went on: "Now a ghost 'as the right to 'aunt a man wot don't do wot he says; and you can't shuffle me off till eight bells—wot I mean is 12 o'clock—can you? 'Cos if you do, it'll 'appen as 'ow I'll 'aunt you. D'ye 'ear? A minute, a second too quick, an' I'll 'aunt you, so 'elp me, I will!"

"'Ow's your chronometer? Wot's your longitude? 'Ow do you know as your time's correct?" Cardegee persisted, vainly hoping to beat his executioner out of a few minutes. "Is it Barrack's time you 'ave, or is it the Company time? 'Cos if you do it before the stroke o' the bell, I'll not rest. I give you fair warnin', I'll come back. An' if you 'aven't the time, 'ow will you know? That's wot I want—'ow will you tell?"

"I'll send you off all right," Kent replied. "Got a sun-dial here."

"No good. Thirty-two degrees variation o' the needle."

"Stakes are all set."

"'Ow did you set 'em? Compass?"

"No; lined them up with the North Star."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

Cardegee groaned, then stole a glance at the trail. The sled was just clearing a rise, barely a mile away, and the dogs were in full lope, running lightly.

"'Ow close is the shadows to the line?"

Kent walked to the primitive timepiece and studied it. "Three inches," he announced, after a careful survey.

"Say, jes' sing out 'eight bells' afore you pull the gun, will you?"

Kent agreed and they lapsed into silence. The thongs about Cardegee's wrists were slowly stretching, and he had begun to work them over his hands.

"Say, 'ow close is the shadows?"

"One inch."

Just then Kent heard the jarring churn of the runners and turned his eyes to the trail. The driver was lying flat on the sled and the dogs swinging down the straight stretch to the cabin. Kent whirled back, bringing his rifle to shoulder.

"It ain't eight bells yet!" Cardegee expostulated. I'll 'aunt you, sure."

Jacob Kent faltered. He was standing by the sundial, perhaps ten paces from his victim. The man on the sled must have seen that something unusual was taking place, for he had risen to his knees, his whip singing viciously among the dogs.

The shadows swept into line. Kent looked along the sights.

"Make ready!" he commanded solemnly. "Eight b——"

But just a fraction of a second too soon. Cardegee rolled backward into the hole. Kent held his fire and ran to the edge. Bang! The gun exploded full in the sailor's face as he rose to his feet. But no smoke came from the muzzle; instead, a sheet of flame burst from the side of the barrel near its butt and Jacob Kent went down. The dogs dashed back up the bank dragging the sled over his body, and the driver sprang off as Jim Cardegee freed his hands and drew himself from the hole.

"Jim!" The newcomer recognized him. "What's the matter?"

"Wot's the matter? Oh, nothink at all. It jest 'appens as I do little things like this for my 'ealth. Wot's the matter you bloomin' idjit? Wot's the matter, eh? Cast me loose, or I'll show you wot! 'Urry up, or I'll 'olystone the decks with you!"

'Huh!" he added, as the other went to work with his sheath knife. "Wot's the matter? I want to know. Jes' tell me that, will you, wot's the matter? Hey?"

Kent was quite dead when they rolled him over. The gun, an old-fashioned, heavy-weighted muzzle loader, lay near him. Steel and wood had parted company. Near the butt of the right-hand barrel, with lips pressed outward, gaped a fissure several inches in length. The sailor picked it up curiously. A glittering stream of yellow dust ran out through the crack. The facts of the case dawned upon Jim Cardegee.

"Strike me standin'!" he roared; "'ere's a go! 'Ere's 'is bloomin' dust! Gawd blime me, an' you, too, Charley, if you don't run an' get the dishpan!"

He Discusses the Modern Kid

THE GENIAL IDIOT.

By John Kendrick Bangs

MY thunder—look at the date, will you?" said the Idiot, pointing to the headline of his morning paper. "November 29th, when it seems only yesterday that we sat up and watched the old year die. Seems to me old Father Tempus should be arrested for fugitting beyond the speed limit."

"He certainly flies fast," observed Mr. Pedagog, with a sigh. "I am getting on in years—past sixty now, and somehow or other it doesn't seem as if my days were more than four or five hours long. I'll be a hundred before I know it."

"You have too good a time, Mr. Pedagog," said the Idiot. "That's what makes your days seem short. You are enjoying your otium cum dig in a scorching age."

"Do you call it ease to have to teach children nowadays?" asked the schoolmaster. "I don't. Compared to how things used to be, it's quite the reverse. Not only is the modern child harder to handle than his father, but somehow or other he seems instinctively to know more. He's a great deal harder to keep up with, and what with that and the new methods of teaching which must be learned, there's precious little spare time for a schoolmaster to devote to his own pleasures."

"The modern kid is one of the most interesting developments of the nineteenth century," said the Idiot. "And I should think you would find daily contact with him quite inspiring. I've got a bunch of nephews myself, and I think they're a ripping lot and each of 'em in a different way. Bobbie is five, Tommy is ten, and Jack is fifteen, and ten minutes with any one of 'em is a liberal education."

"I hope they are not acquiring any of their stores of knowledge from their uncle," said the Bibliomanic. "If they are, I'm going to write to the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children and denounce you."

"No—I'm too selfish to share with anybody the rich stores of learning that I have acquired from years of breakfasting with you gentlemen," returned the Idiot. "I'm a miser with the information I've got at this board—I just hoard and hoard it. When you tell something I never knew before, I wrap it up tenderly in cotton and put it away in a trunk with my other treasures, such as my first sock, and my little blue kid shoe with the white pearl buttons, and the lock of hair my first love cut off one of her switches for me when at the age of eight I tried to get her to desert her grandchildren and run off and marry me. Let your mind rest easy, Mr. Bibliomanic, on that score. I love my nephews devotedly, but I'll see 'em grow up in ignorance before I'll share with them any of that confidential information which you from time to time lavish so generously upon me. Some day I shall use if for the benefit of the public in a ten volume edition of 'The Idiot's Encyclopedia,' which I intend to have publised among my Posthumous Works."

"I dare say, judging from the quality of your discourse," observed Mr. Brief, "that on the contrary you have gained all the information you possess from them, eh? Your facts have a juvenile ring that suggests the idea, anyhow."

"That's it," said the Idiot. "Most of the things I know thoroughly they have taught me. All my theories in regard to the Panama and Nicaragua Canals, for instance, I have got direct from Tommy, the ten-year-old; my views on the subject of literature are at least traceable to Bobby who, though only five, takes a pretty sane view of modern literary conditions, and as for the details of a complete philosophy of living, that fifteen-year-old Jack has got the whole thing at his finger ends."

"What nonsense," said the Bibliomanic. "The idea of a boy of ten having views on the Panama-Nicaragua business that are worth anything."

"Well, Tommy has," said the Idiot. "He was talking about it only the other night. My brother and I were having a discussion on the subject and it was getting pretty hot. He was for Nicaragua and I was for Panama—"

"That's like you," said the Lawyer. "What the dickens has made you a Panama advocate? Do you know anything about it?"

"Why, I have a sort of notion that if the Panama Canal goes through the people down there will be rich enough to buy their own hats, and so relieve the United States of the necessity of wearing 'em," said the Idiot. "On aesthetic grounds I object to Panama hats now that men have taken to shaping them so that they look like inverted coal-scuttles and sugar scoops. But my brother and I were fighting mad about it, and just as he was reaching for a lump of anthracite to throw at me, as a final proof that Nicaragua was the only route worth talking about, and I had grabbed the poker to poke Panama down his throat, Tommy puts in with, 'Aw, dig 'em both, an' come to supper.'"

The poet smiled broadly. "That is a solution that doesn't seem to have occurred to anybody else, at any rate," said he.

"All sorts of ideas that never occur to anybody else occur to Tommy," said the Idiot. "He advanced the proposition the other day that the only part of arithmetic that was of any practical value as far as his experience went was subtraction, because his allowance was never added to, multiplied or divided, but always subtracted from, a theory that fits snugly into the financial condition of ninety-nine out of every hundred citizens of this country. To spend years learning how to write with a pen when type-writing machines can be bought for a song, he regards as a great waste of time and energy, and to study spelling when you can have a secretary to do your letters for you is silly. As for History, he considers it useless to stow away in your head until it aches, pages of stuff that you can find in a book whenever you need to use it, advancing the undeniable truth that what's going to happen is better worth the knowing."

"By jove," laughed Mr. Brief. "He's your nephew, all right, isn't he? Ideas of that kind seem to run in your family."

"Yep," returned the Idiot. That's one reason why I don't like to spoil the youngsters with the commonplace ideas that anybody can have. What's the use of a special point of view if you don't avail yourself of it?"

"I should like to hear about the five-year-old literary prodigy," said the Poet.

"He's a dandy," cried the Idiot, enthusiastically. "His comment on Browning, to my mind, sizes up the situation to perfection."

"Oh, come off," said the Bibliomanic. "What rot. I don't believe any five-year-old boy except possibly the Boston lad of the comic papers who never existed, ever read a line of Browning. You are drawing upon your imagination."

"I never said Bobbie had read Browning," retorted the Idiot. "Save in your imagination. It is you who are overdrawing your account."

"How the deuce can he size Browning up then if he hasn't read him?" demanded the Bibliomanic triumphantly.

"By listening when others read him," replied the Idiot. "My brother is very fond of reading aloud, and if walls had ears, and could spout what they have heard, there isn't a British poet that the plaster of his library couldn't produce. Last Sunday night he began on Sordello and stuck at it manfully to the end. Bobbie was sitting on the floor counting his marbles, and apparently not paying much attention. My brother had read about twenty minutes when he paused to cut two pages apart with his paper knife, when Bobbie put in, 'Say, Pa—if a little boy got lost in the middle of that poym, do you think he'd ever find his way out again?'"

"That boy is all right," said the genial old gentleman who occasionally imbibed. "I feel exactly the same way—when I'm sober. I can't understand half of Browning's poems, unless I've had half a dozen cock-tails and then I'm so togue-twisted I can't explain 'em."

"You should wait until the morning," said the Poet, with a twinkling eye, "and then write out your solution."

"The trouble with that," replied the genial old gentleman, "is that when next morning comes, I've forgotten the explanation."

"Well, that's too bad," laughed the Idiot. "If you only could remember, you could write a sort of Baedeker to Browning which would fill a long felt want."

"Pah," ejaculated the Bibliomanic, I have no difficulty in comprehending him in small doses and think it out—that I admit."

"You're perfectly right there," said the Idiot. "I can testify to that. I have found by personal experience that taking Browning one word at a time, I can understand. When he speaks of embers I know that he doesn't mean snow-balls, and an allusion to blossoming trees can't be mistaken for a reference to lawn-mowers by a man who stops to think. It's when he combines the words in sentences that I get off the track."

"What does Bobbie think of the historical novel?" asked the Doctor. "Does he approve of that?"

"I was coming to that," said the Idiot. "I caught him sitting in a hammock ore Sunday morning off in the country last summer, and he had Susan Brinckeroff Sudberry's 'Red Feather of Provence' in his hand. He was chuckling away to himself to beat the band. 'What's the joke, Bobbie?' said I. 'I'se yeadin'' he chuckled. 'And you like the book very much, eh?' I queried. 'Yes,' he said. 'It's orful funny. I'se yeadin' it upside-down.' And he was. By Jingo, I believe that boy has the making of a critic in him. His favorite characters in fiction are Ernest Thompson Seton and Noah, because they know all about animals. In history he has a pronounced liking for Jack the Giant Killer and Theodore Roosevelt, and for the Babes in the Wood he has no use at all, because they hadn't sense enough to telephone for the police and have their wicked uncle arrested as soon as he began to treat them badly."

(Continued on Page 2 Section 3.